

# Essential e-tailing for retailers

E-tailing is a growing phenomenon worldwide and leading retail groups have invested heavily in IT platforms to create a secure and easy to use online shopping environment. Retailers in South Africa that have not implemented an e-commerce offering will find themselves playing catch-up.



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"E-tail is no longer a 'nice to have' or a 'maybe one day' concept," says Leoni Volschenk, head of KNUP, a logistics and distribution fulfilment partner for the e-tail market. "The transformation from traditional to online purchasing is happening and the early adopter retailers are already reaping the benefits."

The same brand-building principles whereby a consumer experiences a service apply equally in a physical and online shopping environment. For example, if one's brand features are "easy, cost effective and friendly," one's website and online shopping platform must create that same experience. Having a platform with a next level, futuristic design and a complicated buying system creates brand dissonance, which will damage the brand in the spontaneous and unforgiving world of e-tailing.

The distribution arm of e-tail plays a defining role in online shopping. A fulfilment partner must be on top of its game, extend the same brand values and service level expectation that one's in-store offering has established.

"If your brand has offered a high quality, luxury and attention to detail experience in-store, the distributor must replicate that expectation and create the same experience. That includes the whole fulfilment cycle - from the way the product is picked from the shelves (in store or warehouse), packaged, shipped, providing tracking details, to the actual delivery by the courier.

"When the customer opens that package, he or she must feel exactly the same way that he or she felt when supporting the shopping centre store."

Ryno Bekker, GM of On the Dot Contract Logistics, which KNUP is a division of, agrees that e-tailers need to partner with suppliers that understand what brands are made of. "Soon customers are going to become so comfortable in the online shopping environment, the physical store as we know it, may well disappear. Without changing the essence of the retailer's brand, there could be a smaller and altered 'physical' front shop offering, while customers will still have easy access to buying your products."

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